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Cybersecurity: Growing Like Topsy!

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Abstract: This article discusses cybersecurity in an intelligence context – what it is, what it does to us, and the sudden (and somewhat unplanned) increase in financial support for the area.

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* published in 1852, Augustine St. Clare purchases a black slave girl, Topsy. To a question about who made her, she replies, "I s'pect I grewed. Don't think nobody never made me." To the ministrations of Augustine's daughter, Eva, Topsy is convinced that even a slave girl deserves love.

Stowe and her book have had quite a history. There's the apocryphal quote from Abraham Lincoln to Stowe, "So you're the little lady that started this great war." There's the social fact of the book being viewed by different readers, sometimes by the same reader, as both racist and anti-racist, as both pro-slavery and anti-slavery. (A recent biography of Lincoln by Columbia University scholar Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, strongly suggests that Lincoln was, at least for a time, both racist and anti-slavery.) Then there's the book's contribution to American English—growing like Topsy connoting growing in an unplanned manner or growing rapidly.

Turning to this week's topic, it turns out that cybersecurity has been growing like Topsy in both ways. It also has been receiving much love deserved like Topsy or not, if love can be expressed through dollars spent, gifts given, attention awarded much as brides are depicted on reality television shows in the United States such as *Bridezilla* and *Platinum Weddings*.

So what is this thing, cybersecurity, that is growing unplanned, rapidly and loved? As with any definition of security, cybersecurity may refer to a state of mind, feeling safe from intentional harm. It may refer to an objective consequence, that one is actually safe or partially safe from intentional harm. It may refer to a delusion that one actually can be safe from intentional harm much as Jonathan Evans, the director-general of MI5, the British internal security agency, attributes to "...the American mass media [and, perhaps, to many in the American general public and political leadership] the assumption that terrorism is 100 percent preventable and any incident that is not prevented is seen as a culpable government failure." (See Shane, 2010). It may refer to what is being done or intended to be done to achieve any of the above. But what kinds of harm are focal?

Reading through materials from the United States Government's Department of Homeland Security at <http://www.dhs.gov/files/publications/cybersecurity.shtm> and Computer Emergency Readiness Team at http://www.us-cert.gov/reading_room, one might conclude that the main kinds of harm related to cybersecurity include corrupting or stealing information and the corrupting or stealing of technology through which information is created, maintained, and transmitted. Mostly at Issue have been information and technology relating to government, business, academic, civic, social, and personal activity. Some recent, public narratives—stories that are sufficiently suggestive, even if not necessarily fact-based—include attempts to harm Iranian nuclear weapons development through corrupting computer software, to penetrate United States Government computer data bases, to engage in commercially relevant identity theft through the somehow aptly named endeavor of phishing, to induce

titillation and psychological and physical harm (e.g., suicide) through transmitting the most personal acts of sexuality without approval of the actors, and to weaken belief of and political action about climate change through the theft and publicity of all too human comments about research and about researchers by researchers. Other narratives comprise horrors of the future based on actions already committed or about to be committed when the time is right—leading to intelligence, weapons, communications, financial, and utility systems that will malfunction. Other purveyors of narratives maintain that all of this is already occurring and rendering it ever more difficult to validly diagnose paranoia.

Less salient in narratives—but also unplanned, rapidly growing, and beloved—are suspicions of evolving changes in human nature. Just as people who smoke and others who breathe in second-hand smoke may both experience medical sequelae, people who use cybertechnology and others who live in such a world may both experience psychological changes. These changes may be moving at a clip far, far more rapidly than that of traditional evolutionary theories of biology. These changes may be based on the realization that everything one does has a much higher probability of being recorded and transmitted without one's own approval—including one's own use of cybertechnology to hide one's public identity and create new ones. They may be based on the realization that one's image and life history may be modified much more easily than the past. And these changes may be based on cyber-interactions and non-cyber-interactions in today's world with actual, putative, and seeming humans and avatars wherein simulation and dissimulation, reality and fantasy implode in a manner underlining the prescience of Jean Baudrillard's construct of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1993) or even earlier, Monet's impressionism.

The evolutionary perspective on cyber-induced psychological change already is being analyzed in the human realms of (1) mating and sexual competition, (2) parenting and kinship, (3) trust and social exchange, and (4) personal information management (see Piazza & Bering, 2009). And an entire research agenda is being developed under the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self (see Turkle, 2010) to explore what cybertechnology is doing to us as we do cybertechnology.

Much like some counterterrorism protectors through their protection are destroying that which some terrorists seek to destroy, one might conclude that in cybersecurity we seek to protect our souls while concurrently destroying them. Whether this destruction is creative in the positive sense popularized by Joseph Schumpeter in his 1942 work *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* remains to be discovered. So from Uncle Tom's Cabin and Topsy, we end unplanned, growing rapidly, and loved with another cultural artifact imbued with racism and its antithesis—the 1940 musical and 1943 film *Cabin in the Sky*. Whether Little Joe, Petunia, or Georgia Brown, how secure can one be when the soul's up for grabs? And the cyber-soul?

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